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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 002500

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: BRIEFING ON ROYAL NEPAL ARMY OPERATIONS FOR
A/S ROCCA

REF: A. USDAO KATHMANDU IIR 6 867 0028 03

1B. USDAO KATHMANDU IIR 6 867 0029 03

1C. KATHMANDU 2489

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for reasons 1.5 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) On December 17, Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, received a briefing from Major General K.B. Khadka, Director General of Military Operations of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA). The briefing provided an overview of the RNA's strategy to combat the Maoist insurgency, including unified command structure, the formation of Civic Peace and Development Mobilization Committees, and plans for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). The briefing also touched upon human rights and U.S. military assistance. End Summary.

Overview of RNA strategy

12. (C) The Royal Nepal Army (RNA) is deployed in three divisions across Nepal, plus a division in Kathmandu. The RNA is now 72,321 persons strong, an expansion of roughly 40 percent over the past three years when it employed just 51,373 persons. The RNA's objectives are to deter and defeat the Maoist military capability; protect constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy; create a secure environment for elections; and implement policies and measures for effective governance. The RNA's strategy to fulfill these objectives include conducting "relentless operations" against the Maoists; negotiating with the Maoists only once their military capability is reduced considerably or if they agree to abide by the current constitution; enhancing the credibility of the monarchy; and seeking support and cooperation from the people. In order to defeat the Maoists, the RNA has proposed several new concepts, including mobilization of security forces under the Unified Command Concept, the formation of Civic Peace & Mobilization Committees, and the re-integration of Maoists into civilian life through the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) plan.

Unified Command Concept

13. (C) According to the RNA, the Unified Command structure is designed for the optimal use of Nepal's security forces without losing the individuality of each branch. Under the structure, the army is given authority to coordinate and direct operations of the civil and armed police forces and the National Investigation Department (NID). General Khadka cited the legal provisions that support unified command, specifically the Armed Police Force (APF) Act of 2002, which states that the APF falls under the RNA's operational control when the RNA is mobilized. Similarly, a decision by King Gyanendra in November 2002 mandated that 10,000 civil police should be trained and mobilized under the RNA's operational control. The Unified Command structure will remain effective for one year with the option to be renewed for six month periods. The Unified Command receives direction from the National Security Council chaired by the Prime Minister. (Note. The National Security Council is comprised of two Ministry of Defense officials, and one senior representative from each of the four security branches: the RNA, APF, civil police and NID. End Note.) At the regional and district levels, the security forces are overseen by the civil administrators, Khadka concluded.

Civic Peace & Development Mobilization Committees

14. (C) General Khadka described the government's proposal to

establish Civic Peace and Development Mobilization Committees as pilot projects in 3-4 communities and, if successful, could expand them across the country. The government is responding to requests from local citizens who want to improve security in their villages, he said. According to the proposal, the government will mobilize the villagers defend themselves against the Maoists to disrupt their activities with "whatever licensed weapons they have already" (mostly 12-bore rifles, according to COAS Thapa). (Note. Over the past several years, the government had seized most weapons held by local villagers. It remains to be determined how the government plans to return the weapons to their original owners. End Note.) The Mobilization Committees will also receive logistic and training support from the army. The RNA hopes to include retired members of the security forces in the organizational structure of the committees.

15. (C) According to the organizational flow chart, the nearest security base will oversee the Mobilization Committee, which will have three sub-committees: a security sub-committee comprised of local civilians managing various security cells in the VDC area; an advisory sub-committee comprised of local security forces; and a coordination sub-committee comprised of members of both the security and advisory committees. The flow chart shows that, under the national umbrella, local civilians will oversee the operations of the Mobilization Committee under the advice of the security forces. According to the RNA, the role of the security forces will be to provide information, advice, training and reinforcements to the Mobilization Committee.

16. (C) General Khadka explained that the government would like to downplay the defense aspect of this pilot program because of recent criticism in the press and from members of civil society that Nepal is becoming increasingly militarized. He indicated that only three or four committees would be established as pilot projects. If successful, these could be expanded nation-wide. Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa specified that the RNA is considering establishment of three committees: two in the eastern division and one in Lamjung District in the central division. In all cases, he said, the local citizens want to participate actively in their own defense against the insurgents. COAS Thapa noted that similar efforts in Thailand and Peru were successful. "We don't want to create right-wing militias, but the RNA cannot be everywhere at once," he concluded. (Note. This briefing supports information received previously and reported Ref A. End Note.)

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

17. (C) The objective of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) campaign is "to obtain peacefully weapons from armed Maoists and encourage them to live a peaceful life." To attain this objective, the RNA's strategy is to provide monetary compensation to Maoists who surrender their weapons; ensure physical security and grant amnesty to those that surrender; and provide economic security and job opportunities. The DDR program will be managed by a Central Directive Committee, which will oversee local screening committees and rehabilitation center administration committees. The first rehabilitation center will be established in Tanahu District in central Nepal. The government hopes to use both national and donor resources to manage the program. Specifically, national resources will fund the weapon exchange program and provide for a local security base. The government will seek funding from the international community to operate programs in the rehabilitation center, such as skill development training and income generation schemes. (A similar briefing was provided earlier and reported Ref B. Unclass details on DDR provided Ref C.)

Human Rights

18. (C) General Khadka noted that the RNA has established a human rights cell to investigate allegations of human rights abuse by soldiers. Each of the three division headquarters has one officer responsible for disseminating information about human rights and investigating alleged abuses. Those individuals found to have committed rights abuses have been reprimanded, he said. (Note. In the summary of 17 cases of alleged human rights abuses given to A/S Rocca, three of the cases are pending; five were determined not to be abuses; and in nine cases the soldier responsible was punished, two of which were for killings. The punishments ranged from sentences of 7 years imprisonment to 4 months; in two cases, the court martial is ongoing, and in one case the punishment was unspecified. End Note.) Khadka claimed that RNA soldiers have committed no acts of torture, no rapes and no extra-judicial killings, although collateral damage may have

occurred. He also noted that ICRC has been invited to visit prisoners in the army camps. Khadka complained that there is a "large hue and cry" when small RNA transgressions occur, but no outrage when the Maoists commit atrocities. He expressed concern that the Nepali media and some in the international community have "turned a blind eye" to Maoist abuses.

USG Assistance

19. (C) Khadka expressed gratitude on behalf of the RNA for U.S. assistance in providing weapons, equipment and training. He noted that the RNA hopes for further assistance through the FMF program in all three areas. Specifically, the RNA needs helicopters to help improve its mobility in Nepal's rugged terrain, he said. Surveillance training and equipment to track down Maoist political leaders, FM radio interception capability, support for DDR and rebuilding damaged infrastructures were also identified as funding needs. Khadka concluded his remarks by noting that a political solution is preferable to a military campaign. "The ball is now in the Maoists' court," he said.

Comment

110. (C) The Government of Nepal, with the Royal Nepal Army, has initiated three programs to assist its counter-insurgency effort: the Unified Command structure, Civic Peace and Mobilization Committees, and DDR. Through these programs, the government aims to improve coordination within the security forces, establish defensive postures through mobilization committees in areas where the RNA does not have a permanent presence, and encourage Maoists to leave the insurgency and reintegrate into society. It is too early, however, to conclude whether these programs will be successful. Khadka's complaint that the RNA has come under increasing attack recently from the press and local and international human rights groups for alleged abuses is accurate. Whether the negative publicity is the result, as the RNA claims, of a Maoist-fueled campaign to discredit the army, or is a worrisome trend in the RNA's ability to uphold human rights standards, remains to be seen. Five allegations of extra-judicial killings have arisen. The RNA has indicated it intends to investigate them. Post will examine these allegations and report septel. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI